

Filipina Military Brides:  
Negotiating Assimilation and Cultural Maintenance within a Bi-Cultural Setting

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## Abstract

I investigate the extent of spousal influence on assimilation and cultural maintenance as power levels within marriages can reveal hierarchical racial/gender positions in societal stratification structures on a micro-scale. This research is based on seven qualitative semi structured interviews with Filipina women involved in interracial military-based marriages, and is supplemented by archival research and previously published oral histories. Although my hypotheses assume that pressures for assimilation are in conflict with pressures to maintain cultural traditions, the results complicate dichotomous readings of these two forces. The results suggest that assimilation and cultural maintenance can be fundamentally intertwined in the construction of identity. Although social networks play an important role in maintaining cultural traditions, the results also suggest that spousal power is a key determinate in this process, with those husbands who engage in Filipino cultural traditions facilitating a greater amount of cultural maintenance within the lives of their wives.

## Introduction

The United States is in the midst of social change, with massive immigration and increasing rates of interracial marriages altering the structure of race relations and racial inequality. These changes reach beyond the national boundaries through globalization and (historical) imperialism, which have spread American culture and enticed migration. As immigration is on the rise, the need to examine migrant communities function within society is paramount. A population of particular interest is Filipina women married to American military personnel, for within these marriages global migration processes and the effects of globalization can be revealed on a micro-scale.

Assimilation literature analyzes the modes of incorporation into mainstream society, often at the cost of cultural traditions. There is also a body of literature that addresses how immigrants maintain cultural traditions within America. However, power relations are important to examine on macro and micro levels of analysis as these differentials shape daily interaction and the construction of identity. Within a military context, political and economic global processes intersect and can affect American idealization, transnational migration, and economic foreign reliance when U.S. military bases are within foreign lands (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc 1994 & Brands 1992). While this paper addresses the global phenomenon of U.S. military bases within the Philippines, it also examines power relations on a micro scale within interracial marriages, as studies have shown how both interracial and intra-racial marriages are embedded with unequal power distributions favoring males.

Interracial marriages involving military men also have a stigma of prostitution attached to their union. Although interracial marriages were not uncommon in the

Philippines due to Spanish colonialism, this stigma of prostitution is embedded in the proliferation of red light districts surrounding the bases, with the women from Olongapo and Angeles seen as “gold diggers” who deceptively entice American men to take them to the United States, (e.g. Forman 1972). The intersection of seemingly well off American men and poor “prostitute” women fundamentally alters marriage dynamics, as the power is held exclusively by the male. These stigmas may also increase the social reliance on the American husband, as the women experience discrimination within their own respective communities. Despite the myriad of stigmas associated with this specific type of marriage, in the 1970s more women from the Philippines came to the United States through marriage to an American, than any other Asian country, (Sassen 1994, Thorton 1992).

There is a dearth of research that relates interracial power differentials, global migration process, and the processes of incorporation into mainstream society. My qualitative interview study addresses these processes and explores how Filipina women married to U.S. military personnel construct an ethnic identity within a bicultural setting and how they negotiate between assimilation and maintenance of cultural traditions. I argue that assimilation processes are regulated by power differentials within the marriage and access to ethnic social networks that are accepting of the hybrid marriages, with an expectation that assimilation and cultural maintenance are conflicting processes within these women’s lives. I hypothesize that those with access to ethnic social networks and with husbands who engage in cultural traditions will have the least amount of assimilation and the greatest amount of cultural maintenance. Conversely, those without access to social networks with a husband who does not engage in traditions will be the

most assimilated; with access to accepting social networks expected to be of utmost importance. However, the results suggest the husband's interest in maintaining cultural traditions within the home is a key element in assimilation and cultural maintenance processes.

The significance in this research lies in the improved understanding of migration processes, the aftermath of colonialism and the gendered dynamics of immigration. Filipina/o experiences are of utmost importance, as they are among the fastest growing U.S. population, in part, due to residual cultural influences in the media and education from globalization and American colonialism. This research also addresses important gaps in current Sociological literature by utilizing qualitative research methods, investigating the experience of first generation immigrants, and by focusing on a particular ethnic group; and bridges literatures across disciplines, including Sociology, History, and Ethnic Studies, which allows for a richer context in which to place these women's lives.

#### Theoretical Framework: Assimilation & Cultural Maintenance within the U.S.

Immigration research has primarily focused on paths of assimilation into the mainstream. However, there is also a contemporary trend that focuses on how migrant communities maintain cultural traditions. Nevertheless, both sets of literature would benefit from in-depth macro and micro level analyses of power relations that affect immigrant lives and help construct identity.

#### *Assimilation*

### Process of assimilation

Historically, assimilation has been the work of the state, as colonization was viewed as making the “natives” civilized, (Schirmer & Shalom 1987); however, in contemporary society, it is viewed as an immigrant’s process of incorporation into mainstream society, (Gordon 1964, Alba & Nee 1999, Qian 1997, Qian & Lichter 2001, Qian 2002). Much of sociological theory examines immigrant experiences upon arrival, with a focus on the cost of traditional culture(s) when adapting the host country, (e.g. Gordon 1964). Yet by focusing upon the point of arrival, researchers may miss important considerations in motivations for migration, as well as the effect of American cultural influence on the respective foreign country. As Choy (2003) and Yuh (2002) demonstrate, the American education system, (neo) colonial power, and the cultural aftermath of globalization all have a significant impact on how immigrants idealize America and cultivate cultures of migration.

The effect of American idealization is particularly significant in regards to Filipino migration as the Philippines had been a U.S. colony for 50 years. As an imperial power, the United States implemented an education system that taught American cultural knowledge, which continues today. This education not only helped create a longing for migration but also affected the self-esteem of Filipinos, as the Philippines remain a racially stratified society where Americans and white skin are idealized.

In 1947, Philippines signed a Military Bases Agreement with the U.S., which gave the U.S. control over military spaces. Although amended several times, these agreements facilitated America’s continued influence on the Philippine economy and politics. Two of the most important U.S. bases were Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark

Air Force Base, due to their strategic location in the Pacific. Surrounding the military posts were cities that evolved into red light districts. Within these towns, many U.S. personnel found future Filipina military brides, women who married military men and traveled to the United States to live. Along with the American education system, this highly stratified intersection of poor Filipina women and seemingly well off American military men, facilitated American idealization that enticed migration.

This exposure to American culture while within the home country is what I term “pre-assimilation”, defined as the stratification and cultural effects of colonialism, including the proliferation of heavily influential American ideals and values that promote migration to the United States. Because of pre-assimilation, people wish to emigrate due to the visions of America as “the land of milk and honey” where opportunities for upward mobility are “endless” and because of their familiarity with American cultural knowledge and society. Thus, both the nursing migration phenomena seen in Choy (2003) and the transnational movement of domestic workers in Parrenas (2001) can be re-imagined within this framework of increased economic and social opportunities, combined with the familiarity with the foreign land. I argue that within this framework is the experience of the Filipina military brides, whose access to mobility is through a cross-cultural marriage to an American G.I.

This paper expects to see a large amount of American influence affecting the motivations to live in the United States. I hypothesize that the women were actively searching for ways to migrate to the States, with similar motivations as domestic workers, such as American idealization/cultural dominance, high unemployment rate, the education system, and the culture of migration within the Philippines, (Parrenas 2001).

However, I also hypothesize that the women would resist pressures to assimilate into the mainstream society and manage ways to maintain Filipino cultural values, with respect to food, space and identity, (Yuh 2002).

### Intermarriage

Originally asserted by Gordon (1964), intermarriage was said to be the pinnacle of incorporation into society, as it provided evidence of structural assimilation. Contemporary researchers also assume that those within intermarriage have similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, with Asian-White interracial marriages the most common, (e.g. Qian 2002). These researchers purport that the increasing amount of Asian-White marriages indicate that Asians are becoming more accepted within the general society and are moving into a comparable life style as Caucasian Americans, (e.g. Qian 1997). However, not all interracial marriages occur on American soil. Those marriages that occur within a military context not only have significant disparities in socioeconomic status, but often times, significant disparities in education as well, (e.g. Moselina 1987). This reveals the importance of examining migration through a transnational context, where interactions within the home country are taken into account.

Another assumption of interracial marriages, particularly in the pairings between Asian and Whites, is that children will become increasingly assimilated (Gans 1996, Perlmann & Waldinger 2004, Qian 2004). Research by Qian (2004) demonstrates that often times, bi-racial Asian/White children identify as Caucasian, particularly when the marriage is between an Asian woman and a White American male. While this may occur, one has to take into consideration not only the power differentials between the parents, but also the access to the minority parent's cultural networks. If the Asian



woman has a strong cultural network, and the husband engages in, or is accepting of the woman's involvement in her ethnic community, the children may be encouraged to engage in their minority ethnic identity. Thus, the access to cultural networks and the male influence may have a significant affect on ethnic development in bi-racial children.

Although traditional assimilation points to a dissolving stratification between partners, Bonilla-Silva (2004) suggests that interracial marriages do not dissolve these power differentials, but may rather maintain them. This is due to the broader racial stratification scale within society, as well as within micro decision-making situations within marriages. The continuing importance of power levels within marriages are important to examine, as it can reveal hierarchical racial/gender positions in societal stratification structures on a micro-scale.

#### Power relations

While current assimilation literature is vast and broad reaching, there is a dearth of analytic critique in how power relations mitigate the assimilation processes. Evidence of residual (neo) colonial influence and martial differential power support this notion of power differentials within immigrants' space.

Alba & Nee (1999) assert that both immigrant and mainstream cultures influence one other. Assimilation is not a one-way path, but rather an interaction between two societies. Although this literature speaks to the importance of analyzing the interaction of two or more cultures, I believe that there is more work to be done in this field. While immigration/mainstream societies influence one another, this interaction is mediated by power differentials between the host culture and the "other." For immigrants are substantially changed through the migration process by learning the language, acceptable

behavior, the cultural knowledge and the values which shape daily interaction, particularly that of individualism and the protestant work ethic; however, mainstream culture may be influenced on less significant matters, such as food or the occasional culture fest, which can facilitate the continued stereotypes of immigrants as “exotic” and “the other.” Interracial marriages can be the ideal situation to analyze these power relations on a micro scale. I hypothesize that there will be distinct power differentials within the marriages, as evidenced by the husband’s affinity for Filipino culture. Those with husbands who share or appreciate the cultural traditions, including food, language, and values will have greater cultural maintenance than those with husbands who do not engage in Filipino traditions.

Power relations within culturally homogenous marriages have been researched by a number of scholars through a variety of disciplines (Bernard 1998, England & Kilbourne 1990). England & Kilbourne (1990) note that one of the reasons males retain more control within marriages is due to the different gender investments within a relationship. While women generally provide more relationship-specific investments, such as learning a partner’s idiosyncrasies and personal history, men tend to provide portable investments, such as capital. Thus, men are able to bring their investments easily to another relationship, while women have a more difficult time. Taken in light of transnational marriages, this concept has even more relevance. Coming to a new country, an immigrant woman has little to no resources available and may be completely dependent on her husband. Conversely, the native-born male has the necessary resources to survive, thus he is not as reliant on the immigrant female as she is to him.

Bernard (1998) asserts that men and women have different expectations and experience different realities within the same marriage, and this contributes to marital conflict. While Bernard speaks of same-culture couples, this concept is applicable to cross cultural marriages, where one partner's expectations of marriage and gender roles may be in conflict with the other, because of traditions and cultural values held. In this situation, it is hypothesized that the immigrant woman would change cultural beliefs because of the power differential within the marriage.

### *Cultural Maintenance*

#### Social networks

Many ethnic studies scholars report that cultural traditions are maintained through formations of ethnic community organizations, (Bonus 2000, Posadas 1999, Min 1995, Espiritu 2003). Not only do these community organizations provide access to others of similar ethnic backgrounds, but it also provides an opportunity to socialize children. However, cultural traditions are not static, but dynamic and ever changing, and these communities allow those of similar ethnic backgrounds to blend regional differences with national commonalities, within an American setting. Nonetheless, ethnic communities are heterogeneous, with certain populations excluded from entry, such as domestic workers and (Korean) military brides (Parrenas 2001, Yuh 2002, Bonus 2000). As such, more research needs to be conducted on interethnic politics within these communities, particularly in regard as to the politics of exclusion. I hypothesize that (accepting) social networks play a large role in facilitating cultural maintenance, particularly those with networks of other military brides. Conversely, those culturally isolated within their

respective community will be more assimilated to mainstream society, with social networks facilitating the amount of assimilation within the children.

However, I also hypothesize that the women studied will be unaccepted both within the Philippines and from within the general Filipino American communities. As there are stigmas of prostitution and of the women not adhering to the cultural values of *hiya* (shame), due to the plethora of stigmas attached to this type of cross cultural marriages, or *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), as the women are not showing gratitude to their parents because of this association.

However, local communities are not the only ethnic connections immigrants maintain. Often, there are transnational connections to the home country that facilitate cultural maintenance (Espiritu 2003, Parrenas 2001, Alcica 1997). Although women may leave a country to escape restrictive opportunities, there is also a tendency to reconstruct the home nation as a place of comfort and longing, which facilitates constant contact with family abroad. Despite negative connotations regarding their interracial marriages, it is expected that these women maintain cultural connections with the Philippines by sending remittances and remaining in contact with their respective families, facilitating the phenomena of transnational communities.

### Traditions

Within immigrant communities, researchers have often found that food serves as a key component in maintaining ethnic mores, (Espiritu 2003, Parrenas 2001, Posadas 1999, Yuh 2002). As Yuh (2002) demonstrates in interracial marriages between South Korean women and White American military men, the kitchen serves as a safe cultural haven for the women, despite having to serve both an American dish to her husband and a Korean

dish for self. However, food is not the only mode of cultural transmission, as language and child rearing practices also serve to continue ethnic traditions. As such, I expect to see the women use food as a source of continued cultural presence within the home.

Assimilation and cultural maintenance have been popular subjects of study by scholars of a myriad of fields. Much of the available literature addresses how interracial marriages are evidence of structural assimilation and assumes that assimilation is a two-way path, with both mainstream and migrant cultures influencing each other. My research examines more in depth how ethnic traditions are mitigated by spousal influence, with an expectation that assimilation and cultural maintenance are two opposing forces constantly in conflict with one another.

## Methods

This research is based on seven qualitative, semi-structured interviews, conducted throughout Ohio, Michigan, and Seattle, six of which were the population of interest while the remaining subject was involved in a non-military interracial marriage as a means of comparison. Each audio-recorded interview ranged from one hour to three and one half hours, with the average lasting approximately one and one half hours. By utilizing a qualitative methodology, this research can provide a window into interior experiences, how people perceive and interpret events; it also allows detailed processes of migration, integration of multiple perspectives, and provides holistic descriptions of complex concepts, (Weiss 1994).

The questionnaire used to guide the interviews had five parts, including life in the Philippines, transition to the United States, marriage, family, and connection to the

Philippines. The questions covering life in the Philippines sought to uncover family structure and gender roles within the Philippines, as a comparison to the roles and family structure within their American households. These questions were also meant to uncover instances of pre-assimilation and reasons for migration. The questions revolving around the transition period in the States were expected to reveal stereotypes of America and availability of Filipino social networks.

Marriage inquiries were designed to elicit information regarding the husband as an agent of assimilation, how the women are pressured to assimilate and/or resist those pressures, as well as to uncover power dynamics within the marriage. The family inquiries focused on children, with a particular interest in the amount of assimilation/cultural traditions maintained across generation, as seen through language ability and affinity for Filipino food and traditions. Also of interest were child-rearing styles and the influence of American versus Filipino traditions. The final section is dedicated to deducing the strength of connection to the Philippines, and whether stronger ties would lead to greater maintenance of culture. Few subjects needed encouragement to speak, and would subsequently delve into details that covered the matters of interest; nonetheless, many of the interviews loosely followed the interview questionnaire structure. However, often times the subjects would talk around a question, rather than answer it directly, which made the data difficult to compare.

To locate subjects, the researcher utilized the snowball sampling method, where new respondents are located through referrals of past interviewees. Given the nature of the population of interest, this sampling method was utilized because of the difficulty in locating subjects. However, as the methodology was not random, the sample may reflect

biases. The original interviewees were located through the researcher's personal contacts, including friends, relatives, and acquaintances in the Columbus Filipino community. Each subject was given a copy of the interview questions and informed beforehand of her right to decline answering any question.

The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes of assimilation, cultural maintenance and a combination of the two, with particular emphasis on spousal influence. Themes included evidence of male power within the marriage, food, social networks, and view of America and/or Americans. Field notes were written after the interview and described evidence of cultural practices. In particular, the field notes documented the prevalence of Filipino and American décor, with Filipino objects coded as signs of cultural maintenance and American items coded as signs of assimilation. However, the field notes also include information regarding the interview setting and general observations made throughout the interview. Data was then sorted into differing sections of the thesis, with each excerpt addressing certain themes of the research. Each section was then locally integrated, that is, each section had been condensed and interpreted according to thematic similarities and differences. Once interpretation of each section was completed, there was an inclusive integration; that is, the data has been organized into a coherent sequence of the analyzed life stories.

To supplement the interviews, archival data located at the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) in Seattle, Washington, and published oral histories that involve the population of interest, were used.

Results: Conflict between Assimilation & Cultural Maintenance?

It was originally assumed that assimilation and cultural maintenance would be two opposing forces, constantly in conflict with one another. However, the results suggest that two forces can be deeply interwoven. The results also seem to indicate that accepting social networks may not play as large a role in maintaining cultural traditions, as previously hypothesized.

### *Assimilation*

While results regarding the preponderance of American ideology as a factor in migration are mixed; the level of power relations within these interracial marriages is apparent. These differentials have often dictated the amount of assimilation within these women's lives.

### Pre-assimilation

The term "pre-assimilation" condenses research across disciplines that describe how the influence of American ideals and values can entice migration. This definition also includes the cultural, political, and economic aftermath of colonialism and present-era globalization. Although it was hypothesized that there would be a large amount of evidence which supports the existence of pre-assimilation, the results are mixed.

Five out of the seven women interviewed denied migrating to the United States for economic reasons, or for reasons prompted by American ideology. Each asserted that she either could have traveled without her husband or denied wanting to leave the Philippines. The women constructed meeting her respective husband, and the eventual migration to the States, as both a blessing and a sacrifice. As Maria<sup>1</sup> reveals,

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<sup>1</sup> Each subject is referred to by a pseudonym



[My husband] teach me everything that I know! I don't know nothing [before]....I never intend to stay here in America, because we have a very close family [but] ...you have to just really commit yourself you have a husband here in America, and then you have your own, you have to take care of your family here.

However, two of the women readily agreed that they harbored dreams of coming to America to raise their standard of living. As Imee states,

But I had the idea already that when I come here I will stay and get married. To better my life. I want to better my life here in America, cause I was thinking and thinking about the other poor members of the population, at home. I think my purpose in coming here is economic reasons, like everyone else.

The contradictory answers from these two sets of women may reflect the relationship between the interviewee and the researcher. Being of a younger generation, the subjects may not have wanted to disclose personal attributes for migration that may reflect poorly on themselves. Denying economical reasons for the marriage, the women assert the “purity” of their marriage, by detaching themselves from the prevailing stereotypes of Filipina women manipulating Americans in order to migrate. One of the women interviewed who blatantly stated her marriage was a way to leave the Philippines, is closely related to the researcher, who has prior knowledge of her history; thus, this woman may be more willing to express views that may be unflattering. The other interviewee whose desire for a better future prompted migration, revealed that gossip about her marriage(s) was prevalent throughout the Filipino/a American community. Thus, she may have felt more comfortable addressing a presumably taboo topic.

Pre-assimilation also encompasses the ideological view of America. Both the interviews and the archival data support the notion that embedded within the Philippines is the notion of America as the land of “milk and honey” where one is able to “make

more money, have better food;” where the chance to migrate to the States was an opportunity that could not be passed up. Compounded on these general beliefs that infiltrate Philippine society (Espiritu 2003), living within sight of the bases, the women had much more exposure to Americans, their values, beliefs, and technological capabilities. As one woman reports “We went to the base and there was a lot of ship. Oh, so exciting to see a lot of big ship. You won’t get tired of it to see it. I went to ship and went inside. Oh, its so big you won’t believe it.” Thus, exposure to the bases may elevate this already embedded ideal of America. Also within the ideological view is the aftermath of World War II. Americans are often thought of as the “heroes” and “liberators” of the Filipinos from the Japanese, which compounds upon these American stereotypes.

Associated with the idealized notion of the United States, is the romanticized stereotype of Americans, and the subsequent comparison of American men with Filipino men. The women attested that “Americans are stared at [with admiration]” within the Philippines. Interestingly, those still closely connected to the military base shared a consensus that

American husband, I think, are really loving to their wives...American husbands are different from the Filipino husband...American husbands are nicer than one Filipino husband. If you are nice to them, then they give you something in return, but...with the Filipino husbands, they’re always crazy...I can say that American husbands are more compassionate

In another instance, one woman’s husband was praised for serving guests who visited his home. It seems that the women construct their current marriage as superior to ones with a Filipino (American) husband, possibly as a way to validate their choice of marriage despite possible hardships. However, two of the women confessed that race was not a

significant factor; rather the quality depends on the type of husband married and each of the two expressed being “blessed” because of their husbands. Interestingly, these two women were the two married to African-American husbands, as opposed to Caucasian Americans. Each claimed to look beyond the skin color and see the internal being.

#### Power relations within marriage

However, the two subjects married to African American husbands were not the only ones to express utmost gratitude to their respective husband. Gratitude to husband was a central theme with those still married to their husbands, excluding the non-military marriage.

This expression of gratitude reflects both assimilation and cultural maintenance, as these women adhere to American values that place emphasis on dependency on the male head of house. This evidence suggests that the marriages are more American than Filipino in gender dynamic; for in the Philippines, women tend to control household finances, and have a strong(er) voice in household decisions (Posadas, 1999). However, the above example also reflects adherence to the Filipino concept of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), which dictates that receivers of help are indebted to givers. Thus, for families, a child is in eternal debt to their parents because of the parents’ physical, emotional, and financial investment in the child’s upbringing. In the same way, the results suggest that the Filipina women of study express their gratitude and subsequent debt to their husbands for bringing them to the States. As Riza notes, “Servicemen are too good, they took me all over the world. And to this very day, I would never put him in a nursing home, not me. This is for gratitude.”

Although the concept of *utang na loob* is often realized within parent child relations, a parallel can be made within these marriages. As Maria noted, her husband “teach me everything I know...[when referring to a mistake Maria made concerning cake mix] I was dumb about it and everything else.” It seems that the dynamics within these marriages may often mimic parent-child relations, in part due to the husband being the key to American cultural knowledge. As England & Kilbourne (1990) note, this power comes from the portable investments of the husband and the comfort and security invested by the women to their husbands. This overwhelming gratitude may also be an avenue for the women to validate their self and choice to marry an American and migrate to the States, particularly if the reality is not up to par to their previous expectations; as well as a way to assert the purity of marriage by placing the husband on a pedestal.

The males also seemed to serve as the gatekeepers of their respective wives, as seen through my attempt(s) at initial contact, information withheld from their wives, interview settings, and restrictions placed upon the women. Wanting initial contact with Maria, I called her house several times. On each occasion, either Maria’s husband would answer the phone or an answering machine would pick up. Each time I spoke with the husband on the phone, he would say that Maria was currently out of the house and to call back at a specified time later in the day. However, when the follow up call was made, an answering machine would pick up. On the fifth and final call, when I asked for Maria once again, the husband hung up the phone, presumably recognizing my voice. The interview was set up when Maria contacted me via telephone and explained that she just came back from a visit to the Philippines. Although the messages left with the husband

or the answering machines eventually were given to Maria, the husband seemed to restrict access to her.

Another potential subject was to be contacted through a personal friend of the researcher. This friend had invited the researcher to talk to his mother. However, the stipulation was for the researcher only to inquire about her friends and obtain other contacts. When the researcher approached the initial contact person regarding an interview with his mother, as she fit the population of interest, the contact ceased responding to the researcher via email, instant message, and phone; even when the researcher inquired about the mother's other contacts. The initial contact knew of the associated stigmas regarding marriage to an American GI, and seemed adamant about not giving the researcher contact information, despite initially agreeing. Thus, these two males demonstrate that access to the individuals of interest can be facilitated by the males.

Imee confessed that only after her American husband died, was she informed that he had cancer. She had no prior knowledge of his state of health. Thus, she was kept in the dark regarding vital information that would affect the marriage. Her marriage proposal had started off as an economic exchange, where her future husband offered to pay off her debt, in exchange for marriage and companionship. Thus the beginning of their relationship is embedded in economic inequality, and only after death was Imee confronted with the depth of informational disparity.

Evidence that also seems suggestive of male gatekeepers in these women's lives is the interview settings. While in Seattle, the researcher interviewed four of the seven women, all of whom requested to be interviewed together. Set in the basement,

Maricela's husband constantly walked in and out of the room. During the last part of the session, the husband was working in another room within hearing distance from the interview. During the interview with Maria, her husband sat next to her during the entire interview setting. Maria would look to him to describe an event or help with a word, with the husband thoroughly reading all of the materials the researcher had given her. As Maria described her childhood in the Philippines, she began searching for a word to describe her *barrio* (town). He suggested "primitive", which Maria revert to saying each time describing her childhood. Thus interview settings seem to prescribe what could or could not be disclosed.

The interview with Tala seems to indicate that power levels within non-military interracial marriages may be significantly different than differentials within military based marriages. Meeting Tala at her church, Tala proceeded to tell her husband to wait for her while we went into another room to interview. Near the end of the session, the husband knocked on the door, informing Tala that many of the people had left a while ago. She then instructed her husband to sit in the hallway, saying the interview would almost be over. Within this marriage, it seems that the power differentials are not quite as evident as those involving the military, with both marriage partners on a seemingly more equal playing ground. Unlike the women who migrated through a marriage to a citizen, Tala came to the States of her own accord, thus having social networks independent of her husband; which may account for the difference in regulating the interview setting.

A common restriction, asserted by Imee is that "[American husbands] don't want you to associate with other Filipinos most of the time." Although Imee seemed to resist

this regulation, as seen through her close friendships with the other three Filipina women interviewed; what is significant is the contradiction between the assumption that American husbands are better than Filipino husbands, and the requested social isolation. This contradiction may reveal conflicting truths of the portrayed smoothness of these interracial, military-based marriages.

#### Husband interest in Filipino culture

Although hypothesized that the power differentials within the marriage would be evident through the husband's affinity for Filipino culture, it seems that the husband's interest plays a much larger role in maintaining culture than previously anticipated. The married women in the sample seemed to have one of two kinds of husbands, those who were truly interested and engaged in Filipino traditions and those that feigned interest until after the marriage.

Evidence for genuine interest include living in the Philippines, either outside the military or with the wife's family, having extended social networks that include a large portion of Filipino Americans, speaking Filipino language(s), and/or enjoying the food. Those with feigned interest are those who proclaimed to enjoy Filipino food, but once married, insisted on only eating American dishes. Two of the seven women were married to those with genuine interest, three were married to those feigning interest, one with a husband who displayed both a genuine and feigned interest, and one woman divorced from her military husband, chose not to speak of his cultural interests.

Surprisingly, these numbers did not coincide with access to Filipino social networks. Of the two married to those genuinely interested, one lived in a predominately white neighborhood while married to an African American male with the other also

married an African American, but lives in the Seattle/Tacoma area which hosts two large military bases. Those with husbands who feigned interest were also located in the Seattle/Tacoma area. And Tala, whose husband appeared to both genuinely interested in Filipino culture while also feigning interest in its food, lived in the greater Columbus area.

Those living within large, established military bases, which would presumably be more accepting of interracial marriages, did not correlate with deeper involvement within the Filipino community nor greater evidence of cultural maintenance. Of those living in the Seattle/Tacoma area, one woman was highly involved in the greater Filipino community, teaching younger generations Filipino dances and caring for the elderly, despite her husband's wishes; while the other was much more invested within her church, as her husband was an elder, who had earned an advanced degree while living in the Philippines. However, within the church, was a vibrant Filipino congregation, many of whom were involved in interracial marriages. Conversely, the other two women living in this area were on the fringe of the greater Filipino community, with their only close friends the other women within the interview; as their husband's discouraged more active participation.

Outside of the military communities, there seemed to be a plethora of experiences. Maria has been actively involved in her non-Filipino Catholic parish, and is not deeply involved in the surrounding Filipino community. However, her husband has lived with her in the Philippines, deeply enjoys Filipino food, and speaks fluent Tagalog. Tessa, on the other hand, has little to no social networks outside of her mostly assimilated family. While still married to her husband, his family forbade cultural practices and only



encouraged American behavior, which Tessa did not mind, as she used her marriage as a springboard to leave the Philippines. Tala has been largely involved in the greater Columbus Filipino community, but has lately turned to her largely Caucasian Catholic church for friends. Within the Filipino community, Tala made a number of professional friends in similar non-military interracial marriages, which facilitated her involvement. Her husband, whom she describes as a “loner” had very few friends, and so her social networks became his. Thus his lack of social networks and willingness to engage in Filipino cultural traditions facilitated his involvement within the ethnic community, and in turn, facilitated the continuance of Tala’s cultural traditions.

### Children

The amount of assimilation within the children of interracial military marriages is complex, comprised of many different facets, including the amount of spousal interests, the availability of social networks, and the woman’s investment in cultural transmittance. Contrary to expectations, those active within Filipino communities did not necessarily have children who maintained a significant amount of cultural traditions. Riza, a leader in the Tacoma Filipino community, teaches Filipino American youth Philippine dances and history. However, her children, while understanding some Tagalog, do not speak it. In regards to food, when asked if her children liked Filipino food, her response was “...they choose their food. There are things that they like to eat, but my husband...never.” Thus, despite living within a community that was largely accepting of their interracial marriage, and with access to a large Filipino community, the children were more assimilated then expected, which indicates that the husband’s interest in culture is key to its’ intergenerational transmission; and provides further support to the

findings of increased assimilation within children of interracial marriages, (Qian 2004, Gans 1996, & Perlmann & Waldinger 2004).

Conversely, those somewhat isolated within a predominately white neighborhood, can maintain rich traditions, in part, because of the husband's insistence. This has been the case with Maria, whose husband loves Filipino cooking, who has been the "breadwinner" of her family in the Philippines, and who has an advanced degree from a Philippine university. Despite the nominal amount of Filipinos in the area, Maria and her husband raised their children to maintain both African American and Filipino cultures. Their daughters are fluent in two Philippine dialects, for two of the three lived in the Philippines for a number of years; desire Filipino food, and maintain Filipino values, particularly those revolving around dating, such as chaperoning dates and having the boyfriend court the girls through the parents. However, maintenance of cultural traditions has evolved to combine aspects of the American mainstream. For instance, Tala taught her children Tagalog at a young age, by using American tools such as language books and tapes. Thus, she utilized mainstream mediums in order to transmit Filipino cultural knowledge.

On the other extreme, there are instances where children are forbidden to speak their native language, and cannot engage in any tradition, as was the case with Tessa's first born daughter. The family-in-law that Tessa and her husband lived with refused to have her daughter speak Tagalog, and conditioned her to behave as an "American." Thus, the daughter became highly assimilated and to this day knows very little regarding the land where she was born and raised until seven years of age. Archival analysis also

suggests that some husbands restrict access to any social networks, isolating women to an extreme.

### *Cultural Maintenance*

Women creatively utilize available means in order to transmit and maintain their cultural traditions. Often times, Filipino customs are blended within American ones to create distinct “Filipino American” traditions that reside only within bicultural settings, as seen in preparation of food dishes and construction/maintenance of hierarchies within their social networks.

#### Food and Household Décor

Although food can be a source of contestation within these marriages, as evidence by husbands’ instance on eating solely American food, the majority of these women have strived to maintain food as part of culture either through making separate meals or through the blending of recipes. Although her husband insists on chicken or hamburgers for dinner and she complies by cooking chicken in a “traditional” American way; Tala confesses that she smothers the chicken with a unique sauce, made with ingredients reminiscent of the Philippines. Although Tala asserts she does not make “authentic” Filipino food, she manages ways to circumvent situations that could have relegated a loss in cultural forms.

Of the houses in which three of the interviews took place, two held a significant amount of Filipino décor, including paintings, carved wooden chests, wall hangings, and family photographs which displayed both the Filipino and non-Filipino family members; this is a strong indication of cultural maintenance. Interestingly, the two women whose house décor is explained are the two women married to African American males. The

other household had a plethora of Catholic paraphernalia, including the Virgin Mary and angels, paired with predominately non-Filipino décor. This indicates slight cultural maintenance, as the Philippines are a predominately devout Catholic nation.

#### Connection to the Philippines

Another arena in which women maintain forms of culture is through communication with the Filipino family living abroad. Each of the women in the study maintains some form of contact with her family. Although these instances range from monthly phone calls, to remittances and economically supporting various family members, each woman has asserted that this constant communication is vital to both her family and her self.

Construction of the Filipino American community is another way to stay connected to the Philippines. By bringing over relatives, one can build a community that fosters ethnic traditions, but also allows these women to receive emotional and ethnic support in an otherwise American household. While the building of this type of community was evident in Yuh (2002)'s work within South Korean military brides, the same is not true for this sample. Only two of the women attested to bringing over family members, while one other maintained that although family members migrated to the United States, each came of their own accord, not through her assistance. Thus, results from this small sample are mixed in terms of military brides as key components in building Filipino communities.

#### Hierarchy

Another arena that blends cultural maintenance with assimilation is the hierarchy within interracial marriages. Although stigmas of the Filipina woman and American man

are rampant both within the Philippines and within the United States, the women studied revealed that they too, judge and look upon others whom are assumed to be former prostitutes and take advantage of their American husbands. Imee asserts that “they come here married somebody, take their husband for granted and if they are Navy and are assigned to different places, the girl go bar-hopping.” While Riza agrees that

Those women who are doing such a thing, you know where they associate from...most of them, 99% of them, where did they come from? Out of the bar, Olongapo or the bars from Clark Field...some of them have a little bit of a decent background, but not all of them.

The women attest that they “can tell who are the bar girls by the manner in which they carry themselves.” Thus, although judged by Filipinos and Americans alike, these women place themselves in a social hierarchy where those within large military communities judge are on the top, followed by those still married, with those whom divorce are at the bottom. Interestingly enough, the one woman in this study that divorced her military husband, asserts her identity through the rejection of the Filipino (American) community. Aware of the gossip (*tsismis*) from the mainly professional, Filipino organization within her city, Tessa asserted “I don’t care about those stupid Filipinos...they think they all that...” Since these women were not adhering to the etiquette of *pakikisama* (smooth interpersonal relations), she dismissed the importance of their accusations and rejected Filipino communities.

Thus, this hierarchy mimics those within the Philippines who judge interracial marriages as relationships between prostitutes, or “indecent” women, and Americans. These women judge those with whom they feel have no *hiya* (shame), the very thing outside community condones them with. Imee and Riza also note the phenomena of the

“bar girls” as women who do not show gratitude to their husbands. She mocks those women who migrate to the States, then go “bar hopping” and eventually divorce their husbands; for those type of women are not adhering to the concept of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), and thus deserve to be judged. However these women, themselves are not adhering to the Filipino concept of *pakikisama* (smooth interpersonal relations), because of the created strife within their small ethnic community. This suggests evidence of assimilation into mainstream society, where individual expression, rather than smooth relationships, is revered

### Discussion

The lives of these women show that construction of an (ethnic) identity is complex, with multiple facets of their lives coming under self-scrutiny. These women have constructed their marriage and their lives in a way that intertwines both assimilation and cultural maintenance as seen through the women’s overwhelming gratitude to their respective husband, and through the constructed hierarchy within military interracial marriages. For culture is not static, but constantly under revision. However, it seems that maintenance of culture can fundamentally include aspects of assimilation, as seen through the methods used in instilling values across generations and the preparation of food. These results complicate dichotomous readings of these two theories. Also evident in these findings is how spousal influence and power is a definitive factor in the processes of assimilation/cultural maintenance within these interracial marriages. It seems as though husbands’ interest in Filipino culture facilitated cultural maintenance despite access to social networks. For those whose husbands were not interested in

learning cultural traditions, the access to social networks played a larger role in engagement with culture.

Despite evidence that indicates power differentials within these marriages facilitate the development of cultural maintenance and/or assimilation, little overt conflict was evident within the interview content and setting. While this may indicate limitations to the interview setting, this also suggests that the conflict within these women over the pressures of assimilation and cultural maintenance may be more subtle than previously anticipated.

Although the significance of this research stems from its findings regarding power relations, the need for a transnational context and the intertwined aspects of assimilation and cultural maintenance, there are specific limitations that are a direct result of the methodology used. Because of the nature of the interview structure, it is possible that signs of “pure” cultural traditions may not been evident, such as interactions with children, in terms of lullabies sung or bedtime stories told that have been passed down across generations. Another limitation is the interview setting, where the presence of others may dictate what is said and what is withheld. The relationship between a subject and the researcher can also mitigate what is said within an interview, particularly in cultures where youth are expected to revere elders. Thus, my age may have restricted access to certain thoughts and experiences, such as marital strife. In fact, during each session, the interviewee inquired about the background of the researcher. Having Filipino heritage was not the only requirement for entrance into this selective community, but rather the family history of the researcher needed to be disclosed before the subjects were willing to discuss their own situations.

This study has also shed light on directions for future research involving these communities. Each woman attested to an experience of discrimination, particularly in employment. However, in each case the discrimination was ignored, with no meaningful action taken, or the discrimination experiences were not recognized until later in life or through another informing her of the situation. The implications of ignoring discrimination are broad reaching, particularly in an era of anti-immigration sentiment. Thus, more research should be conducted, on not only this specific community, but also Filipinos and other ethnic minorities as a whole, in experiences and actions taken due to discrimination.

Although it was originally hoped that this study would be geo-specific, the time constraints and the personal contacts lead to interviewees that spanned the nation. Future research should focus on those within the Midwest, as the majority of ethnic based research focuses on the coastal experiences. Another area of future research could address the preliminary findings of racial differences experienced by Filipina women married to African American as opposed to those involved with Caucasian men. Although this sample was too small to extrapolate on a larger scale, the African American men were much more engaged in Filipino cultural traditions. As Maria surmises,

I felt like, because my husband, when I came here, I found out that his family is just like mine. The way they believe in, they have the same family, grandmother, grandfather, there in Mississippi and he's got a kids in Chicago. And they send money, and they give money, the same tradition I was in. Like I said, the only difference I is the color and the hair.

Within a study on the possible differences between African American and Caucasian men, in terms of the processes of assimilation and cultural maintenance, the racialization



of dark skinned peoples within the Philippines should be taken into account, so as to analyze how stereotypes within the Philippines effect interpersonal dynamics. This research has not only pushed forward analysis on power relations regulating assimilation and cultural maintenance processes, but has opened up multiple avenues for future research.

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